

## The Media and Prevention

Participants are introduced to media advocacy, media literacy and social marketing.



*approximate time:  
2 hours, 15 minutes*

### Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- understand the significant influence of media in prevention
- apply media advocacy principles to a case study
- analyze alcohol and tobacco ads
- describe the basic principles associated with social marketing
- identify and challenge campaigns based on principles of health terrorism

### Materials and Preparation

Be ready to use the following information and work sheets:

- **Media Advocacy Case Study Part I and Part II**
- **The Seven Critical Media Messages**



## Media Advocacy Case Study Part I

Lydia Encinias was having a hard time deciding on a community improvement project focused on the theme “say no to drugs.” Lydia was an eighth grader at Pojoaque Middle School in Pojoaque, New Mexico, a community of just over 1,000 people located about 10 miles north of Santa Fe. Every year, students in New Mexico participate in community improvement projects sponsored by Future Homemakers of America/Home Economic Related Occupations (FHA/HERO). Lydia’s teacher urged her to think about a possible project over the weekend.

### The Story

On Saturday morning, as she and her grandmother drove past her school, Lydia noticed two billboards for alcohol, one for Hamm’s and the other for Budweiser. She realized that her fellow schoolchildren had to see the ads on their way to and from school and that one of the ads was visible from the school windows:

“We saw how close the billboards were to each school. They were both advertising beer and they were both facing the school. I thought that was kind of strange, so I decided to do something about it and try to get the messages down.”

This would be her project to improve the community and help kids say no to drugs. The project gained the backing of the Middle School principal and Lydia’s teacher. In addition, two sixth graders, Maya Salazar, 11, and Jacqueline Benavidez, 13, volunteered to help Lydia.

The three students began by asking who controlled the kinds of advertisements that were placed on the billboards. First, they called the alcohol companies advertising on the billboards. The companies told them that they did not own the billboards but simply rented the space from the billboard company. The students discovered that a local real estate manager, Joseph Martinez, was responsible for leasing the Pueblo land to the billboard companies. They called Martinez several times, but received no response. They decided to pay him a visit.

Martinez would not talk with or see them. Discouraged, the students were tempted to give up; however, they had taken the project on and they were determined to see it through. The students researched local laws that governed the billboards. Lydia’s uncle, Judge Art Encinias, a municipal judge in Santa Fe, told them that because the billboards were located on Pueblo land, they were governed by Pueblo law and not by the state of New Mexico or by local laws or regulations.

A few days later, Lydia’s teacher, Glenda DePaula, ran into Felix Benavidez, a member of the school’s Substance Abuse Advisory Committee. She told him about the students’ difficulties. He replied that if the students were encountering resistance, they must be on the right track. He explained that they needed broader community support and suggested that if the students could demonstrate grassroots involvement in their issue, the billboard company and the real estate agent would have to respond.



# Media Advocacy Case Study Part II

## Getting Grassroots Support

The students acted on Benavidez's suggestions and began to mobilize the support of the other schools, other students and the community at large. First, they contacted the New Mexico Records of Vital Statistics and other agencies to find out how many deaths in their county were alcohol-related, what percentage of those deaths involved underage drinkers, how much the town was spending on drug education and so on. Armed with facts, they visited the other schools to tell them about the project and gain their support. They also went door to door in their neighborhoods, asking residents to sign a petition calling for the removal of the alcohol ads on the billboards. They collected 260 signatures—a quarter of the town's population.

## Getting Media Attention

In mid-February, Maya's mother mentioned her daughter's project to a friend, Tom Sharpe, correspondent for the *Albuquerque Journal*, the largest daily newspaper in New Mexico. Sharpe decided to do a story on the girls' project, but warned them that his editors in Albuquerque would make the final decision about whether the story would be published. It also occurred to Maya's mother that her employer was related to the editor and publisher of *The New Mexican*, a local paper. She mentioned the project to her employer and told them that the *Albuquerque Journal* was working on a story about it. She also encouraged the three students to get in touch with *The New Mexican* themselves.

T.J. Sullivan, the education reporter for *The New Mexican*, called Maya's mother 2 days after she had spoken with her employer. Sullivan wanted to interview the students and their teacher. On March 7, *The New Mexican* ran a front-page story with the headline, "What Kid Can Resist That? Students Declare War on Booze, Tobacco Ads" (Sullivan, 1992, p. A1). The article described the three students as "crusading to get billboards advertising alcoholic beverages and tobacco products banned from areas near schools." It went on to say that they were seeking a legislative sponsor for a bill prohibiting alcohol and tobacco ads within view of elementary and secondary schools. As a quote from Lydia put it, "They show money and cars and women. What kid can resist that?... We spent \$11,000 [in Pojoaque] trying to promote drug education and here's what we're talking about right across the street," referring to the beer ad near her school.

On March 10, the *Albuquerque Journal* ran Sharpe's (1992b) article on the project in a special section circulated only in northern New Mexico. This time Jacqueline's quote gave the students' message: "It's dumb to have the billboard for beer right by the school because

WORK SHEET



it's like encouraging the kids to drink beer" (quoted in Sharpe, 1992b). Sharpe had managed to reach Richard Zanotti, general manager of Gaechter Outdoor Advertising, the company responsible for placing specific ads on the billboards. Zanotti told Sharpe he was unaware of the students' project and that the two billboards were not in violation of the company's code requiring that alcohol and cigarette ads be placed at least 500 feet away from schools.

In the next week, the Budweiser ad disappeared, replaced by a public service ad from National Council of La Raza encouraging Latinos to stay in school. On March 16, the headline, "Beer Ads Canned" topped the front page of the *Albuquerque Journal* (Sharpe, 1992a, p. A1). The story told of the replacement of the Budweiser ad and said that the other beer ad would be taken down soon. This time, Zanotti said the location of the signs was "an oversight...we usually don't put them near schools or churches."

On March 17, "Students Win Battle Over Billboard" (Easthouse, 1992) was the headline in *The New Mexican*. *USA Today* ran a short paragraph on the story that same day ("State Round-Up," 1992). The three students' project won first place in the local and second place in the statewide FHA/HERO competition. As Lydia put it, "I felt good about myself because I had succeeded in getting the billboards down and reaching our goal, making the community more aware and having their support."

## The Lessons

This case provides a dramatic example of how the media can bring an issue into the light of day, thereby making it impossible for people not to pay attention. Before the newspaper story, the issue was invisible. The people who had the power to make the change necessary refused to see the issue. The newspaper coverage made that impossible. On the other hand, three things made the newspaper pay attention: young people taking on a big issue, the irony of beer ads close to the school and the large base of community support. Finally, access was gained because someone had the confidence to pitch the story.

The project was a success, but the work is not done. The billboard company's action was voluntary, and the beer ads could come back at any time. According to Maya's mother, "The next step is to involve the Pueblos in getting a policy made saying that these billboards cannot be used for alcohol and tobacco."



## The Seven Critical Media Questions

Knowing the answers to these questions is key to understanding media messages.

### 1. Who is communicating and why?

Every message is communicated for a reason—to entertain, inform and/or persuade. However, the basic motive behind most media is to profit through the sale of advertising space and sponsorships.

### 2. Who owns, profits from, and pays for media messages?

Media messages are owned. They are designed to yield results, provide profits and pay for themselves. Both news and entertainment programming try to increase listenership or viewership to attract advertising dollars. Movies also seek to increase box-office receipts. Understanding the profit motive is key to analyzing media messages.

### 3. How are media messages communicated?

Every message is communicated through sound, video, text and/or photography. Messages are enhanced through camera angles, special effects, editing and/or music. Analyzing how these features are used in any given message is critical to understanding how it attempts to persuade, entertain or inform.

### 4. Who receives media messages and what sense is made of them?

Messages are filtered through the “interpretive screens” of our beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors. Identifying the target audience for a given message and knowing its “filters” and the way in which it interprets media messages help make you media sharp!

### 5. What are the intended or underlying purposes and whose point of view is behind the message?

Behind every message is a purpose and point of view. The advertiser’s purpose is more direct than the program producer’s, though both may seek to entertain us. Understanding their purposes and knowing WHOSE point of view is being expressed and WHY is crucial to being media sharp.



## 6. What is NOT being said and why?

Because messages are limited in both time and purpose, rarely are all the details provided. Identifying the issues, topics and perspectives that are NOT included can often reveal a great deal about the purposes of media messages. In fact, this may be the most significant question that can uncover answers to the other questions.

## 7. Is there consistency both within and across media?

Do the political slant, tone, local/national/international perspective and depth of coverage change across media or messages? Because media messages tell only part of the story and different media have unique production features, it helps to evaluate multiple messages on the same issue. This allows you to identify multiple points of view, some of which may be missing in any single message or medium. This is typically referred to as the “multi-source rule.”

(Media Sharp: Analyzing Tobacco & Alcohol Messages, 1999)